DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 440 761 PS 028 508

AUTHOR Hallam, Susan; Ireson, Judith; Mortimore, Peter; Davies, Jane

TITLE Children's Socialisation into Schools' Learning Contexts: Ability Grouping in the UK Primary School.

PUB DATE 2000-04-00

NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the American Educational Research Association (New Orleans, LA, April 24-28, 2000).

PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS Case Studies; Comparative Analysis; Educational Philosophy; *Educational Practices; Elementary Education; *Elementary School Students; Foreign Countries; *Grouping (Instructional Purposes); *Homogeneous Grouping; *School Attitudes; *Student Attitudes

IDENTIFIERS United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

As the incidence of ability grouping at the primary level increases in the United Kingdom, questions remain regarding the effect of various grouping arrangements on students' personal and social development and the role of the school ethos in adopting particular ability grouping structures. This research explored the rationale given by primary schools for adopting ability grouping practices; how students of different ages and abilities experienced, understood, and were socialized into the grouping practices; and how grouping affected student attitudes toward school. Participating in the case study were students and staff at six schools; each school had adopted a different type of ability grouping. Data were collected by means of interviews conducted with educators, administrators, and six students from each age group. Findings indicated that despite differences in grouping practices, there was considerable commonality in their written philosophies and aims. Many students were able to provide rationales for their school's grouping practices that were consistent with those of staff. Some students suggested disadvantages associated with ability grouping, and over 40 percent had experienced or witnessed teasing related to grouping practices or academic ability. One school had a markedly lower level of teasing, although students were aware of the grouping in place, suggesting that other factors such as school ethos or parents' and teachers' attitudes may also influence teasing. Most students expressed positive school attitudes, although none of the reasons for liking/disliking school were related to grouping. (Contains 20 references.) (KB)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 440 761

Children's Socialisation into Schools' Learning Contexts: Ability Grouping in the UK Primary School

Susan Hallam
Judith Ireson
Peter Mortimore
Jane Davies

Paper Presented at the Annual Conference of the American Educational Research Association (New Orleans, LA, April 24-28, 2000)

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
S. Hallam
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PS 028 508

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Children's socialisation into schools' learning contexts: ability grouping in the UK primary school

Susan Hallam, Oxford Brookes University, Judith Ireson, Peter Mortimore, Jane Davies, Institute of Education, University of London

Introduction

Ability grouping in primary schools has a long history in the UK. Streaming, where pupils are allocated to classes on the basis of their ability, was introduced after the 1931 Primary School Report and was the accepted form of ability grouping until research showed that it had no positive effects on academic achievement (Blandford, 1958; Daniels,1961; Barker-Lunn, 1970; Ferri, 1971; Gregory, 1984) and had detrimental effects on pupils' personal and social development (Willig, 1963; Barker Lunn, 1970). Since then most classes have been mixed ability with within class ability grouping for some of the curriculum, usually mathematics and spelling.

Recently, in the drive to raise educational standards, there has been an increasing interest in encouraging other forms of more flexible ability grouping (Hallam and Toutounji, 1996; Hallam, 1996). Consideration of the international literature suggested that there was no evidence for the benefits of streaming on academic achievement at elementary (primary) level, although where students were regrouped across age levels and given learning materials appropriate for their current level of performance, attainment could be improved in a number of subject areas, e.g. mathematics and reading (Ingram, 1960; Skapsi, 1960; Hart, 1962; Slavin, 1987). Such ability grouping arrangements received governmental support (DfEE, 1997; Ofsted, 1998) and recent research (Hallam et al., 1999) has suggested that schools are increasingly adopting such practices.

Still at issue, however, is the effect of these grouping arrangements on pupils' personal and social development. How do pupils perceive these arrangements? Do their perceptions have negative affects on their personal and social development? The earlier research on streaming suggested that in non-streamed schools social adjustment, social attitudes and attitudes to peers of different ability appeared "healthier"; there were more positive attitudes to school; greater participation in school activities, particularly in those of average or below average ability (Barker Lunn, 1970); and a more co-operative atmosphere (Jackson, 1964). These effects appeared to be mediated by the attitudes of teachers and peers in school, which in turn may have been affected by school ethos factors.

Ability grouping policies adopted in a school do appear to be related to school ethos. What is not clear is whether grouping policy determines or reflects school ethos. Early research in the UK indicated that streaming was more likely to occur in large schools where there was a large proportion of pupils of low socio-economic status. In these schools corporal punishment was common and the wearing of school uniform was more likely to be compulsory (Tibbenham, Essen & Fogelman, 1978; Fogelman, 1983). At primary level, Jackson (1964) found that in streamed schools there was prejudice against pupils of below average ability and an assumption that ability was largely inherited and therefore immutable. Unstreamed schools appeared more relaxed, had less seat work and a less competitive atmosphere. Similarly, Barker-Lunn (1970) found that streamed schools were more systematic in their educational approach, concentrated more on the 3Rs, made greater use of tests and had more authoritarian teachers. Teachers in non-streamed schools were more permissive, preferred more active methods of instruction and emphasised self expression and personal experience.

PS 026508

What is at issue is whether the adoption of particular ability grouping structures reflects the ethos of the school which in turn impacts upon pupils' perceptions of the rationale for the grouping practices

and subsequently their personal and social development and attitudes towards school. This research aims to explore these issues.

Objectives

The aim of this research was to explore:

1) The rationale given by schools for the adoption of their ability grouping practices;
2) How pupils of different ages and abilities experienced, understood, rationalised and were socialised into the grouping practices;
3) How this affected their attitudes towards school.

Methods and Research Design

To explore these questions six case study schools were selected, each adopting a different type of ability grouping. Details of the schools are given below.

School 1: (Pupils on roll: 720) Classes are organised on a same-age basis. Children are assessed on entrance to the school and are streamed according to ability up to Yr 3. From Yr 4 they are organised into mixed ability classes and are set for the core National Curriculum subjects (English, mathematics, science). Specialist teachers are employed to work with higher ability sets.

School 2: (Pupils on roll: 283) Classes are organised on a mixed age basis. Up to Yr 2 pupils are in mixed-ability classes with within-class ability groups for the core subjects. In Yr 3 they are streamed into 3 mixed age classes based on ability.

School 3 (Pupils on roll: 342) Children are organised in mixed age classes from Yr 1. Pupils are set for maths and English from Yrs 1 / 2. The rest of the curriculum is taught in mixed-ability or within-class ability groups. There is an able children's extension group from Yr 3.

School 4 (Pupils on roll: 405) Pupils are organised into same-age, mixed-ability class groups. There is a whole-school setting policy for maths, with the rest of the curriculum taught in mixed-ability groups, with some within-class ability grouping. There is a Year 6 able children's extension group.

School 5: (Pupils on roll: 70) Pupils are organised into 2 mixed age class groups and are subsequently grouped in a wide variety of ways, including some setting, according to the curriculum area, teacher judgement, and available space.

School 6: (Pupils on roll: 420) Children are organised into same-age, mixed ability class groups. The school has a strong commitment to mixed-ability teaching although for some subjects children are ability grouped within a mixed-ability context.

Research Methods

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with: the Head teacher; the Deputy Head teacher; Core Curriculum Subject Co-ordinators; two classroom teachers; two school governors; six pupils from each year group. The pupils were interviewed in mixed-gender pairs and were selected on the basis of ability by their class teacher. Three pairs were interviewed from each year group (above average, average, or below average). All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Documentation relating to the school's policies was collected. Transcripts were coded with the assistance of NUD*IST 4 software package.

Findings

What rationale is given by schools for the adoption of their grouping practices?

Despite the differences in the grouping practices of the participating schools, there was considerable commonality in terms of their written philosophies and aims (see Table 1). The provision of an educational environment where all pupils were given the opportunity to reach their full potential was important for all of the schools, although in practice they placed different emphasis on the importance of particular educational outcomes. There was no clear relationship between the written aims and the schools' grouping practices, although the interview data indicated that the grouping practices adopted in each school were believed to be largely commensurate with the aims (see Tables 2 and 3). The interviews with Head Teachers provided an outline of the development of current grouping practices. Raising the academic performance of pupils was of principle concern in all of the schools. Structured ability grouping was regarded as having a direct and positive impact on children's academic attainment.

In all of the schools the staff were aware of the advantages and disadvantages of different types of grouping. The ethos of the school was viewed in some schools as a vehicle for ameliorating the perceived possible negative effects of structured ability grouping on pupils' personal and social development. Working in mixed ability groups and classes was perceived to give pupils the opportunity to work collaboratively with children of differing abilities, develop important social skills and provide support for each other. It also enabled the less able pupils to have access to able role models. There was also an awareness that the adoption of particular ability grouping procedures could contribute to a hidden curriculum.

Decisions about grouping also had to take account of practical matters. A recurring theme was maximising available space and resources. These were key issues in whether particular ability grouping practices could be adopted. Optimising the use of subject specialist teachers was mentioned by some schools as a reason for adopting setting. This was seen to enhance the possibility of children in very and less able groups attaining their full potential.

All schools, which participated in any form of setting or streaming, stressed the importance of viewing a pupil's allocation to a particular group or class as a flexible one, which necessitated constant monitoring and assessment. Schools claimed that pupils could move between groups and classes according to need, but the extent to which this happened in practice varied from school to school. Where schools adopted structured ability grouping communication with parents of a pupil's placement or movement between ability groups was seen to be important. Placement in sets and movement between them was often a cause of parental pressure and dissatisfaction. Communication with pupils about their placing was also important.

Where classes were mixed-ability and groupings were within-class, decisions about allocating pupils to groups were left to the discretion of class teachers. In making such decisions teachers tended to take account of behaviour, maximising positive working relationships, friendships, and gender.

Table 1
Written philosophy and aims of each school as outlined in the prospectus

Type of ability grouping	Philosophy and aims of the school as outlined in materials given to parents
School 1 Streaming at KS1 and in YR3, setting for core curriculum for rest of KS2.	The educational philosophy of this school is based upon the view that every child should be regarded and valued as in individual person with academic potential, needs, problems and aspirations, who can make a distinct contribution to the life of the school. This school will provide a stimulating and exciting learning environment in which children are able to learn, create and experience, and to display their achievements. Parents, pupils and staff, in co-operation, will create an atmosphere to which the child will respond by accepting responsibility for his behaviour, his work and his attitude to the community's needs. The children will be encouraged to have an understanding sympathy and tolerance for cultures and societies other than their own.
School 2 Mixed ability/within-class ability grouping in KS1, streaming for the whole of the curriculum in KS2	In partnership with parents, staff and the wider community we aim to: Have consistently high expectations and match these with quality resources and learning skills; Provide a range of educational and social experiences appropriate to the age, ability and needs of our pupils and promote a professional learning environment; Enhance children's quality of learning through the effective and efficient delivery of the curriculum; Develop self-respect, appreciating the legitimate rights of individuals, encouraging social awareness and sensitivity, whilst nurturing spiritual and moral values. Create opportunities for every individual in the school community to develop his or her maximum potential; Adopt a philosophy of continuous improvement of every aspect of the school's work and life.
School 3 Setting for maths and English from Yr 1. Mixed ability/within-class ability grouping for the rest of the curriculum	We aim to provide the best education we can, for each child in the school. We recognise that each child is an individual who comes to school already knowing many things. We aim to build on what the child knows so that we can provide an education which meets the needs of the individual as well as those of society and the world in general. In support of the overall school aims, it is our intention to help teachers provide a curriculum which provides for the intellectual, social and emotional, physical, moral, spiritual and creative development of each child. We believe that these needs are best met in a school which has a positive approach to its work and is happy and well ordered. We believe that the best education comes when all of us, teachers, parents, support staff and governors, work together in partnership in the best interest s of the children in our care.
School 4 Setting for maths from Yr 4. Mixed ability/within class groupings for rest of curriculum.	We aim to provide a stimulating planned environment which will meet and challenge each child's individual needs, physically, intellectually and emotionally. We insist on good standards of behaviour and respect for the school, its facilities, the teachers and each other. Parents and teachers have a shared responsibility in the development of children.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

School 5 Cross age setting for maths and English	It is the aim of the school to provide the building blocks necessary to empower children with the skills, to provide educational and enrichment activities that will enable them to achieve their individual potential and become responsible citizens. We aim to: Provide a solid background in the core subjects and do all we can to help our children achieve in these areas; Provide many experiences for hands-on instruction in mathematics, science, communications and computer technology recognising that these are the areas where children will be competing for jobs in the future; Provide an atmosphere where children are taught responsibility and are held accountable for their achievement and for the choices they make; Teach social and co-operative skills needed to lead a successful life; Recognise that children will be the leaders of tomorrow; Recognise that children teachers and the whole school community grow in an environment of positive reinforcement where all are encouraged to better themselves. We believe our school is a warm caring place where children feel comfortable and happy about their learning. Some of the beliefs that we as educators hold about children are: They are unique and important. All children can and will learn and each requires differing amounts of time and practice. The most successful children are those whose parents play an active role in their education. Positive motivation strategies maximise learning opportunities. Self esteem is at the heart of successful, happy children.
School 6 No setting. Mixed ability/within class grouping	To encourage a calm, secure, purposeful and happy atmosphere within the school, to enable children to work to the best of their ability, showing interest and enthusiasm. To foster positive caring attitudes towards everyone where academic and social achievements at all levels are acknowledged and valued. To encourage increasing independence and self discipline so that each child learns to accept responsibility for her/his own behaviour. To have a consistent approach to behaviour throughout the school with parental co-operation and involvement. To trust children and teach them to be honest and trusting with each other and to develop their respect, kindness and consideration of others. To raise awareness about appropriate behaviour by making boundaries of acceptable behaviour clear and to ensure safety. To create an environment where teachers, children, parents and other adults alike can expect to be listened to and treated politely and fairly. To respect children's individuality when responding to their behaviour and encouraging them to think about their behaviour and self-control. To create a successful community, the individuality of all members must be respected, regardless of race, gender, class, religion or differences of a physical nature.

Table 2

Summary of school aims and their operationalisation in practice

School	School aims and their operationalisation
School 1 Streaming at KS1 and in YR3, setting for core curriculum for rest of KS2	School aims * children come first * children leave the school as well rounded individuals * every child is given the opportunity to reach his/her full potential The whole school commitment to the aims is apparent and the belief that the grouping practices in place are fundamental to achieving the aims mainly by facilitating teachers in delivering work at an appropriate level. No concerns were expressed about the potential drawbacks of the systems in place because of the underlying unanimous belief that the system works.
School 2 Mixed ability/within-class ability grouping in KS1, streaming for the whole of the curriculum in KS2	School's aims (under review) * every child is given the opportunity to reach his/her full potential * to foster high expectations in teachers and pupils * to develop self-respect and social awareness * to provide a safe, secure and happy learning environment * to deliver the curriculum efficiently and effectively. Grouping practices are perceived as assisting in achieving the aims particularly in enabling the lower ability children to move up and in assisting teachers to target individual learners. Some concern expressed over the effects of streaming on the lower ability pupils and labelling although generally the staff are supportive of the systems in place and see them as conducive to achieving the aims.
School 3 Setting for maths and English from Yr 1. Mixed ability/within-class ability grouping for the rest of the curriculum	School's aims * to enable children to develop to their full potential both socially and academically * to produce helpful members of the community * to instil a pride in coming to school and a respect for other people * to create a caring and happy learning environment. There is a whole-school belief that the grouping practices do achieve the aims particularly in the provision of work that is appropriate and challenging. There is a strong ethos of respect and communication with an emphasis on everyone enjoying success at their own level.
School 4 Setting for maths from Yr 4. Mixed ability/within class groupings for rest of curriculum.	School's aims * to enable children to develop to their full potential * to prepare children for entry into secondary school * to instil a sense of discipline and respect for others * to improve academic performance of all children * to provide a well-rounded education. Unanimous belief that setting does raise achievement in maths and that setting is not appropriate for English and other subjects because of the effect on children's self-esteem. Aims are met through the provision of work at an appropriate level but flexibility within the setting system was emphasised in order for the system to be successful.
School 5 Cross age setting for maths and English	School's aims * to provide a broad education * to regard each pupil as a whole person and as an individual * to create a family atmosphere * to foster high expectations * to produce valuable members of society. Grouping practices are considered to support the aims through stretching the more able and through the creation of positive learning environments. Constant monitoring, evaluation and discussions are considered to be fundamental to success.
School 6 No setting. Mixed ability/within class grouping	School's aims (under review) * to provide a successful education for each child * to foster high expectations * to foster good work habits, creativity, and independence in all pupils * to prepare children to life outside school * to reach high standards in SATs testing. Generally held belief that current grouping practices support aims particularly in fostering cooperation and integration through mixed ability work. Strong ethos of non-competition and inclusion. Some concern expressed by members of the senior management team about the need for consideration of alternative practice.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Table 3

Rationale for the adoption of particular grouping practices

School	The perceived benefits of the grouping practices adopted
School 1 Streaming at KS1 and in YR3, setting for core curriculum for rest of KS2	• Improving all pupils' academic achievement • Improving SATs results • Encouraging more focused, whole-class teaching • Avoidance of creation of a 'sink' group by grouping pupils at KS1 in streams ABB to cater for wide ability range but with no C stream • Easing transition from KS1 to KS2 by maintaining streaming in Yr 3 • Catering for individual strengths and weaknesses while avoiding stigmatisation • Maximising the use of subject specialists
School 2 Mixed ability/within-class ability grouping in KSl, streaming for the whole of the curriculum in KS2	• Improving academic performance • Extending more able pupils • Supporting less able pupils in smaller teaching groups • Reducing the range of differentiation • Raising the quality of teaching and learning • Improving general school performance • Responding to Ofsted recommendations following inspection
School 3 Setting for maths and English from Yr 1. Mixed ability/within-class ability grouping for the rest of the curriculum	• Improving SATs results • Catering for the extremes of the ability spectrum • Improving the clarity of planning and schemes of work • Alleviating potential problems caused by mixed age classes • Reducing ability range in classes for maths and English
School 4 Setting for maths from Yr 4. Mixed ability/within class groupings for the rest of the curriculum	• Catering for the wide range of needs in maths • Enabling each pupil to achieve his/her full potential • Enabling settling into KS2 by not setting in Yr 3 • Enabling better allocation of pupils to sets by allowing time for assessment by not setting in Yr 3 • Taking advantage of subject specialisms of staff • Avoiding demoralisation of children in the lower sets by not setting for English
School 5 Cross age setting for Maths and English	• Raising levels of achievement • Catering for individual needs • Enabling all pupils to achieve their full potential • Reducing differentiation within classes • Providing children at the top of KS2 with the opportunity to work with same age peers • Maximising available space in the school
School 6 No setting. Mixed ability/within class grouping	• Improving SATs results • Increasing the confidence of the children • Providing opportunities for pupils to work collaboratively • Providing access to peer models • Providing access to peer support

How do pupils of different ages and abilities experience, understand and rationalise different ability grouping practices?

Many pupils were able to provide rationales for the grouping practices adopted in their school which were consistent with those of staff. For instance, in School 1 one pupil stated

' I think they decided to do that so that the children could get the best education that they need. Then the teachers who are good at different subjects can help the children who need it- they can help the children who are good at something and the children who are different. I think that I prefer setting because I know that with setting I will be given the best education that I need because when we were doing it as a whole class there were some children who had different abilities from us to them and the teacher sometimes needed to help them more. During the setting they mainly focus on your actual ability so the work is really suited to what you can do. It's better when everyone is about the same because then you don't waste time'.

Another child said:
'Because the children who are really brainy, they go into the top groups because they get to do hard work and in sets like me they might have a bit more help and go a bit slower and then in the really, really low sets they might struggle with some things. It's not a bad thing though. It's good.'

In School 6, where there was a strong commitment to mixed ability teaching the pupils' perceptions of groupings reflected that:

'I think the teacher decides where we sit because she probably doesn't want to put all the friends with their friends – put them all together because then they'd talk all the time, but that sometimes happens so she tries to make it quite fair. Sometimes we get to move tables.'

'I sit with one friend and 3 other boys and a girl. That's probably because we get on quite well and because it's a mixture of boys and girls.'

'Working in a group you can get ideas from other people and some people work together.'

Where there was a mixture of grouping practices the children's comments reflected this:

'Science is mixed ability. I think it's nice to have mixed ability classes because it's different and it's nice for people that aren't very good and think "oh yea' I feel a lot more comfortable", I expect. It's much more fair because then people don't make fun of them because they're in a lower group. We would prefer to do Maths and English like that as well because you get split up – you're not with your nearest friends and people sometimes tease you that you're in the top group and so it's nice to be with your friends.'

'We do the same topic but sometimes we have different work. I think that she looks at who gets on well and will work well together.'

The majority of pupils had an accurate awareness of how and why they were grouped. Pupils generally felt that the ways in which they were grouped were effective. Most pupils suggested that they would not make any changes to the practices in place in their schools, although a sizeable proportion suggested that they would like to move into a different group to do harder work, or to be with their friends (see table 4).

Table 4
Pupils' desire to change groups

School	Wish to move to a higher group/have harder work	Wish to move to a different group to work with friends	Wish to be in a lower group/ have easier work	Wish to move to a different group to be with a particular teacher	No desire to change groups/ happy with groups
1 Streaming at KS1 & Yr 3, setting for core curriculum for rest of KS2	35%	6%	6%	6%	47%
2 Mixed ability / within-class ability grouping in KS1, streaming for whole curriculum in KS2	21%	17%	4%	4%	58%
3 Setting for maths and English from Yr 1, mixed ability/within- class ability grouping for the rest of the curriculum	30%	20%	10%	10%	30%
4 Setting for maths	33%	0%	6%	6%	61%
5 Cross age setting for maths and English	11%	33%	0%	0%	56%
6: No setting, mixed ability/within-class ability grouping	14%	0%	0%	0%	86%
Overall percentage n=85	26%	12%	2%	5%	55%

For pupils who were set for at least one subject, the most frequently-mentioned perceived advantages of setting or streaming systems included having work set at an appropriate level or pace; having the opportunity to work with different peers; and having experience of better teaching or explanations. Some older pupils also perceived a connection between being set and obtaining higher scores in national tests.

A small number of pupils suggested disadvantages associated with setting and streaming, for instance, the repetitive nature of the work in some sets; the unsettling effect on the school day; and, from a below average ability pupil, the sense that he was missing out on more interesting work. Similar observations were made about streaming with the additional concern that pupils' strengths and weaknesses across the curriculum might not be met.

Over 40% of respondents from the six schools reported either having been teased or having witnessed teasing that was related to grouping practices or academic ability. For some, the teasing was interpreted as 'playful', particularly for those children in the higher ability groups but many found it upsetting. School 5 had a markedly lower incidence of teasing, although the children were aware of the ability groupings in place. This suggests ability grouping alone is not the only relevant factor. School size, ethos, expectations, and the attitudes of parents and teachers may all be important (see Tables 5 and 6).

Table 5
Reported teasing in each school

School	Teasing	No teasing
School 1: Streaming at KS1 & Yr 3, setting for core curriculum for rest of KS2	39%	61%
School 2: Mixed ability / within-class ability grouping in KS1, streaming for whole curriculum in KS2	32%	68%
School 3: Setting for maths and English from Yr 1, mixed ability/within- class ability grouping for the rest of the curriculum	57%	43%
School 4: Setting for maths	50%	50%
School 5: Cross age setting for maths and English	19%	81%
School 6: No setting, mixed ability/within-class ability grouping	46%	54%
Overall %	41%	59%

Table 6
Frequency of teasing by ability

School	Above average ability		Average ability		Below average ability		
	No	%	No	%	No	%	Total
School 1: Streaming at KS1 & Yr 3, setting for core curriculum for rest of KS2	0	0%	3	43%	4	57%	7
School 2: Mixed ability / within-class ability grouping in KS1, streaming for whole curriculum in KS2	2	27%	2	27%	3	43%	7
School 3: Setting for maths and English from Yr 1, mixed ability/within- class ability grouping for the rest of the curriculum	2	25%	2	25%	4	50%	8
School 4: Setting for maths	3	25%	5	42%	4	33%	12
School 5: Cross age setting for maths and English	1	50%	1	50%	0	0%	2
School 6: No setting, mixed ability/within-class ability grouping	4	50%	3	37%	1	13%	8
Total and Overall %	12	28%	16	36%	16	36%	44

When asked to assess themselves academically, the majority of pupils demonstrated a self-perception in accordance with that of their teachers. The exception to this was School 6, where a high percentage of lower ability pupils did not consider themselves to be so. There was also a tendency for the boys to overestimate their ability.

Do grouping practices and pupils' experiences of them affect their attitudes towards school?

Most pupils expressed positive attitudes towards their schools, although there was some variation. None of the pupils' reasons for liking or disliking school were related to ability grouping practices (see Tables 7 and 8). There were no clear relationships between liking or disliking school and age or ability. For most pupils the most important factor which affected their enjoyment of going to school was being in a safe and happy environment and having friends.

Table 7
Pupils' attitudes towards attending school

School	Positive	Negative	Mixture
School 1: Streaming at KS1 & Yr 3, setting for core curriculum for rest of KS2	74%	4%	22%
School 2: Mixed ability / within-class ability grouping in KS1, streaming for whole curriculum in KS2	70%	13%	17%
School 3: Setting for maths and English from Yr 1, mixed ability/within- class ability grouping for the rest of the curriculum	71%	5%	24%
School 4: Setting for maths	61%	0%	39%
School 5: Cross age setting for maths and English	88%	4%	8%
School 6: No setting, mixed ability/within-class ability grouping	66%	4%	30%
Overall	71%	5%	23%

Table 8

Reasons given by children expressing positive attitudes towards school

Reason for liking school	Percentage of total response N = 140
Having lots of friends/ being in a friendly environment / being with kind people	25%
Doing Maths	19%
Doing Literacy / Literacy-related activities	18%
Playing sports / PE	17%
Having good teachers / Having friendly, helpful teachers	16%
Playtimes / playing outside / playground games / playground facilities	14%
Doing Art	11%
Doing Science	10%
Working hard / doing hard work	7%
Doing history	6%
Using computers	4%
Technology / making things	4%
Having fun in school	3%
Having assemblies	3%
Playing a musical instrument	1%
Having school concerts	1%
Doing R.E.	1%
Being in a small school, and getting more attention	1%
Not being bullied	1%
Doing geography	1%
Calling teachers by their first names	1%

Conclusion

The ability grouping practices of primary schools and the rationale for adopting them tend to be accepted by the pupils as 'the norm' and come to be justified by them in similar ways to the staff of the school. Despite their acceptance of the overall ability grouping framework pupils may wish to be in a different group, dislike testing and experience negative reactions from other pupils. Overall attitudes to school do not seem to be affected by ability grouping per se. Other factors including school size, ethos, expectations, and the attitudes of parents and teachers may act as mediators.

References

Barker Lunn, J.C. (1970) *Streaming in the Primary School.* Slough:NFER

Blandford, J.S (1958) Standardised tests in junior schools with special reference to the effects of streaming on the constancy of results, *British Journal of educational Psychology, 28,* 170-3.

Daniels, J.C. (1961) The effects of streaming in the primary schools: II Comparison of streamed and unstreamed schools, *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 31,* 119-26.

DfEE (1997) *Excellence in Schools.* London: HMSO

Essen, J., Fogelman, K. & Tibbenham, A. (1978) Some non-academic developmental correlates of ability-grouping in secondary schools, *Educational Studies, 5(1),* 83-93.

Ferri, E. (1971) *Streaming Two years later: A follow up of a group of pupils who attended streamed*

and nonstreamed junior schools. (London, NFER)

Fogelman, K. (1983) Ability grouping in the Secondary School In K. Fogelman (Ed) *Growing up in Great Britain, Papers from the National Child Development Study,* Macmillan for NCB.

Fogelman, K., Essen, J., & Tibbenham, A. (1978) Ability grouping in secondary schools and attainment, *Educational studies, 4(3),* 201-212.

Gregory, R.P. (1984) Streaming, setting and mixed ability grouping in primary and secondary schools: some research findings, *Educational Studies, 10(3),* 209-226,.

Hallam, S. (1996) *Viewpoint: Grouping pupils in school.* London: Institute of Education, University of London.

Hallam, S., Ireson, J., Chaudhury, I.A., Lister, V., Davies, J., and Mortimore, P. (1999) *Ability grouping practices in the primary school: A survey of what schools are doing.* Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the British Educational Research Association, University of Sussex at Brighton, September 2-5, 1999.

Hallam, S. & Toutounji, I. (1996) *What do we know about the grouping of pupils by ability? A research review.* London: Institute of Education, University of London.

Hart, R.H. (1962) The nongraded primary school and arithmetic. *The arithmetic teacher, 9,* 130-133.

Ingram, V, (1960) Fling evaluates its primary cycle. *Elementary School Journal, 61,* 76-80.

Jackson, B. (1964) *Streaming: An education system in miniature.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

OFSTED (1998) *Setting in primary schools: A report from the Office of Her Majesty's chief Inspector of Schools* London: OFSTED

Skapsi, M.K. (1960) Ungraded primary reading program: An objective evaluation. *Elementary School Journal, 61,* 41-45.

Slavin, R.E. (1987) Ability grouping and student achievement in elementary schools: A best evidence synthesis. *Review of educational research, 57(3),* 293-336.

Sunday Times 18-12-94 *"Labour schools go back to basics"*

Tibbenham, A., Essen, J., & Fogelman, K. (1978) Ability-grouping and school characteristics, *British Journal of Educational Studies, 26(1),* 8-23.

Willig, C.J. (1963) Social implication of streaming in junior schools, *Educational Research, 5,* 151-154.